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HANDLING INVESTIGATIONS

TO : Department of State

E011652: N/A

TAGS : PINS, PORS, ASEC, SHIM, GT

DEPT PASS: MANAGUA, SAN JOSE, SAN SALVADOR, TEGUCIGALPA
USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ-*111111*

FROM : AmEmbassy GUATEMALA

DATE: JUL 13 1970

SUBJECT : Monthly Report on Violence and Human Rights:
May 1978

REF

SUMMARY. The killing of at least 38 campesinos at Panzós, Alta Verapaz Department, makes May 29, 1978 one of the darker moments in Guatemalan history. In addition, 32 persons died and 13 were wounded in apparently politically-related incidents. The number of wounded at Panzós, including seven soldiers, was officially tallied at 24, but is doubtlessly higher. A government agent's body turned up with the letters "ZETA" carved on his chest, raising speculation about a new subversive organization. Indian communities in El Quiché complained to President LAUGERUD about discrimination in military conscription. Guatemala deposited the instrument of ratification for the San Jose Human Rights Convention, but the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs attacked President Carter's human rights policy. President Laugerud expressed his opinion that new political parties be legally inscribed.

END SUMMARY.

Government-related Violence. Even without Panzós, May would have registered as one of the worst months for political violence in recent years. Panzós alone will be remembered, along with Sansirisay (the shooting of dispossessed campesinos) in 1973 and Patzicia (an Indian uprising and massacre of non-Indians) in 1944. The considerable repercussions are discussed in Guatemala 3145, 3221 3273, 3565 and 3612.

A Guatemalan student arrested for "possession of drugs" was found later dead in a ditch. His body showed signs of

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FORM DS-323

Drafted by:

POL:REK:ag:mc

Contents and Classification Approved by
DCM: GRADKENS

DCM: GRADY, EWING

Cleary:

POL:AMIsaac

POL:VHBlocker (draft)

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torture and mutilation. The police who had arrested him are suspected and are being held for trial.

Three students who reportedly were kidnapped, turned up in jail charged with common crimes. A Ministry of Government spokesman, by way of explanation why police officials sometimes deny having detained a student when his parents make inquiries, noted that at least one of the three had given a false name on being arrested. His true identity was not determined until some time later, the spokesman said. (Comment: Police officials have on previous occasions similarly explained failure to inform relatives of the whereabouts of prisoners.)

Guerrilla-related Violence. On May 1, EGP guerrillas celebrated Labor Day by taking over the nearby Agua Caliente recreation center for approximately 30 minutes. The guerrillas lectured some 800 workers who, they stated, should have been demonstrating solidarity with fellow workers in the May Day parade in Guatemala City. After distributing propaganda and painting signs and slogans on the walls, the guerrillas withdrew. The exploit recalled the EGP's sidetracking a passenger train full of holidaying workers last October.

In Chimaltenango a suspected guerrilla was reported kidnapped while being taken from jail to a nearby court. It is not clear if his alleged kidnappers were comrades or security agents of some sort.

Other Violence. Numerous other reported killings were by unknown persons, some dressed in olive green. (The EGP group at Agua Caliente was dressed in olive green, but groups of other persuasions have also disguised themselves in this fashion and, of course, military uniforms are that color.)

Police tend to discount speculation that a police agent's body with the letters "ZETA" represented the work of a new subversive group. Nothing similar has turned up since May.

Human Rights Atmospherics. Thirty-five Indian communities in the Department of El Quiché complained to President Laugerud that military conscription is discriminatory since few ladinos (non-Indians) are called to serve. Moreover, they complained that such service breaks up families and violates the human rights provisions of the Constitution. The Indians cited

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Article 1 which guarantees inhabitants the right to life, security and justice. Also cited was Article 43 which states that no person can be subjected to servitude or to any condition that impairs his dignity or respect. The Article continues: "Any discrimination because of race, color, sex, religion, birth, economic or social position or political opinions is prohibited." (Comment: Practice, not discriminatory laws, makes it possible for non-Indians to avoid military service. The military prefer Indians for enlisted forces since they reputedly accept orders and discipline more readily than non-Indians.)

In a May interview with the English-language Guatemala News (a local weekly), then-Deputy Foreign Minister Luis AYCINENA criticized President Carter and U.S. human rights policy. Aycinena was being interviewed on the occasion of Guatemalan Congressional approval of the San Jose Human Rights Convention. Denying that pressure from the Carter administration had been responsible for the Guatemalan Congress approving the convention, Aycinena stated that "Carter's stand on human rights is exaggerated. Do not the Indian reservations in the United States violate human rights?"

Aycinena's criticism continued: "Carter says he won't sell us arms for human rights reasons, and then he says he won't do it because we could use them to invade Belize." He added: "Now what really is the reason?" Asked his opinion of the status of human rights in Guatemala, Aycinena supposedly replied that he would "do as Carter always does: I'll say 'No comment.'" (Comment: Bearing in mind that the foregoing is one newspaper's representation of Aycinena's views and may be something less than accurate, it should be noted that Aycinena is a holdover in the new administration who has reverted to his former position as Director of Legal Affairs.)

On the brighter side, President Laugerud urged the inscription of additional political parties in strong terms. Nevertheless, the then-Electoral Registrar had taken no action by the time Laugerud left office on July 1. The new Electoral Registrar has indicated that he is favorably disposed to inscribing new parties which meet the legal requirements. It remains to be seen if this is more than lip service.

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Statistics. Of the 32 deaths (apart from Panzós) in May, 15 were in the Indian highlands, 8 in the Pacific lowlands, 5 in the Oriente and 4 in Guatemala City.

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